



## Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

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### Abraham Lincoln

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Many people know who Abraham Lincoln is and have a general understanding of what he did while he was in office, but this is the extent of their knowledge. Many of Lincoln's greatest achievements occurred before he was in office; Lincoln did everything from write political satires to rise through the ranks of the Illinois bar. Throughout his life, Lincoln achieved numerous feats, and it is a shame that he is only recognized for the few he completed while in office.

Even when Lincoln was a youth, he was intelligent. His mother had taught him to read and write at a young age. When he lived in Indiana with his father, after the death of his mother, he wrote speeches, political satires, etc. His satires, though "not refined, were very stinging," according to the historian Henry Ketcham. At the age of 21, Lincoln and his family had moved to Illinois, for fear of catching the "milk sickness" in Indiana.

When Lincoln came into manhood, he had not committed any crimes, he had no vices, and was a very respectable person. Years later, in 1831, Lincoln had been selected to go down to New Orleans and sell merchandise from a manufacturer in the area. On the way down to New Orleans his boat became stuck in the river. Lincoln then designed a mechanism that got boats "un-stuck" and patented it, this patent brought him no riches, but it was a very crafty invention. Once Lincoln was assaulted and played no foul; however, when the crowd became angry and started to gang up on him, he did not fight back. After this incident, Lincoln became the town hero and the general peacemaker.

When Lincoln was a practicing lawyer in Illinois, he was a very respectable one. He never went for the theatrics, never made exaggerated gestures. Lincoln participated in many cases, one of which was *Bailey v. Cromwell*. In this case, Lincoln defended “an indentured black girl, Nance, in Tazewell County, where she was sold by one white man to another.” Because slavery was illegal in Illinois, Lincoln had persuaded the jury that, in Illinois, it was illegal to sell a free being, regardless of race. The jury eventually agreed and the girl was set free. In a similar case, where Lincoln defended Robert Matson, he defended the slave-owner. In this case he lost, but these cases certainly made Lincoln’s mind up about slavery. He once said that “slavery has the power of making me miserable.”

From 1830 to 1860, Lincoln did various jobs, ranging from storekeeper to senator. In this time, he never forgot about slavery. He fought against it vigorously in Congress claiming that it was “founded on both injustice and bad policy.” However, he opposed the spread of abolition societies. In his time as a lawyer, he steadily rose to first rank on the Illinois bar. When Lincoln was in Congress, he opposed the Mexican-American War and was criticized for it back at home. He was not re-elected. After five years of being out of the political limelight, Lincoln decided to re-emerge due to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and debate with Stephen Douglas. Lincoln was clearly a man who stuck to his beliefs.

In his time before becoming president, Abraham Lincoln accomplished many things. It is obvious that he is a great man and deserving of the attention given to him, but he should also be recognized for what he did before elected. He was a magnificent lawyer, a firm believer, and was incredibly smart. Abraham Lincoln should be recognized for all that he has accomplished, not just the tip of the iceberg. [From Henry Ketcham, *The Life of Lincoln*, 2003 <<http://www.authorama.com/life-of-abraham-lincoln-1.html>> (Oct. 15, 2008); “Lincoln spent 6 important years. . .” *Political Career 1830-1860*, <<http://www.nps.gov/liho/historyculture/political.htm>> (Oct. 16, 2008); and

“When Abraham Lincoln was born. . . “ *The Lincoln Legacy*, 2006  
<<http://www.thelincolnlegacy.org/timeline/speaker.htm>> (Oct. 15, 2008).]